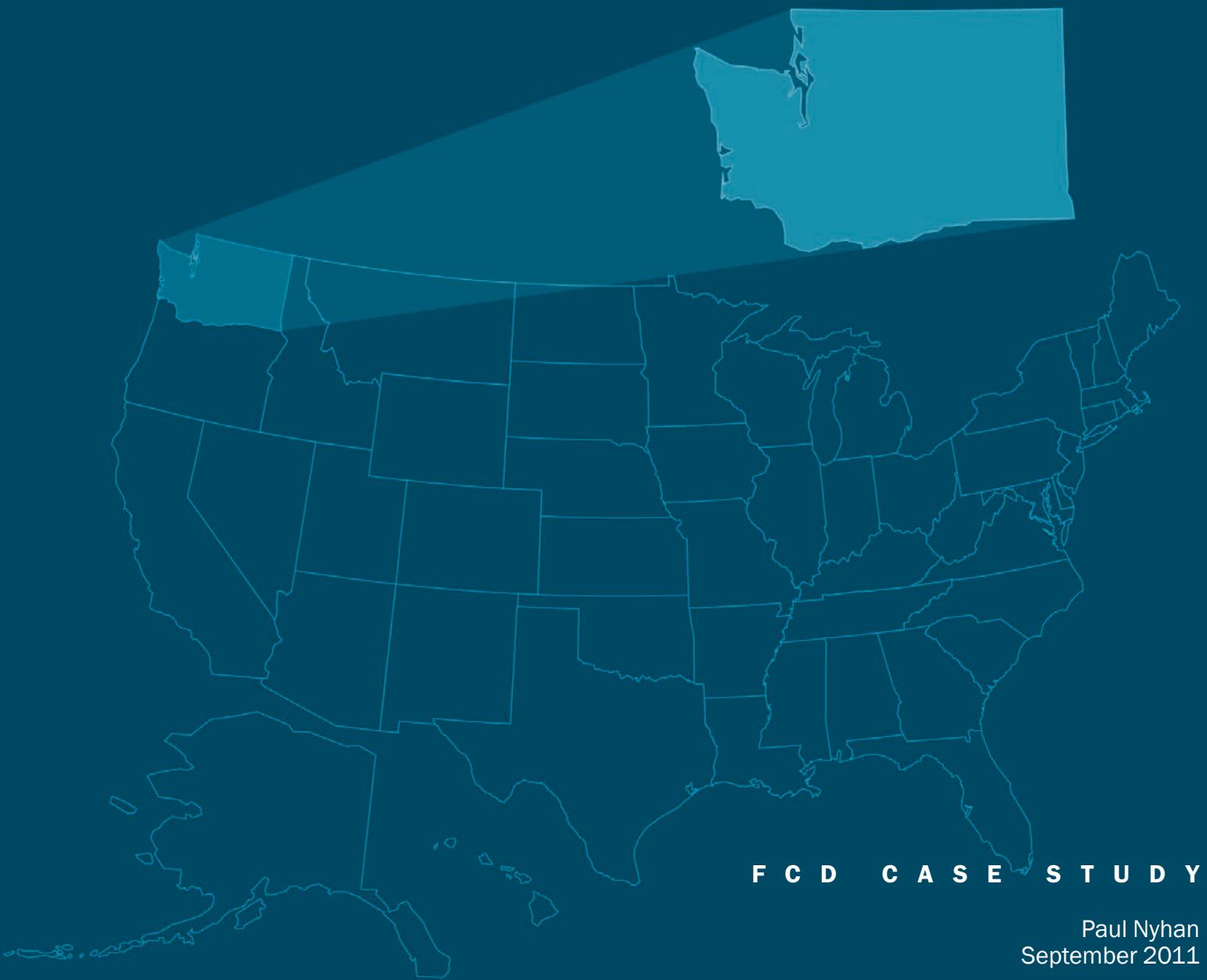


# The Power of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup>:

How a Small Foundation Helped Push Washington State  
to the Forefront of the PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Movement



## **FCD Case Studies**

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# Introduction

The New School Foundation was not born from a commission, legislative mandate, research project, think tank, or even the mind of a leading education scholar. One of Washington state's pioneering PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> initiatives began as the brainchild of a wealthy Seattle businessman, Stuart Sloan, 20 years ago.

Sloan was an unlikely education crusader. He had earned a fortune running auto supply, software, and grocery chains, and in 1991 he was looking for ways to give some of that fortune back. It was a time when individuals and organizations launched ambitious experiments in education—the charter school movement was in its infancy, and Teach for America was a year old. One experiment in particular captured Sloan's attention. A couple, Joseph and Carol Reich, were building a model school in Brooklyn, NY, for low-income students called Beginning with Children.<sup>1</sup>

After meeting the Reichs, Sloan decided to fund the creation of a similar school in Seattle, eventually forming The New School Foundation to run the project, though he wanted control over how his fortune was spent and a say over curriculum, length of the school year, goals, and class size. This desire for control signaled his broader ambition. Sloan did not want to build just one good school. Instead, he wanted to create a model that could be replicated within Seattle, where he envisioned similar schools, and potentially around the nation.

Ten years before PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> emerged as a concept in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Sloan and his team began developing something that looked a lot like it. They wanted a school that started in PreKindergarten, encouraged engagement and accountability by

parents, educated the whole child by focusing on a student's social, psychological, physical, and academic needs, offered small classes, aligned early elementary grades, and served low-income families. It was an ambitious plan to create a different educational system, and that idea of systemic change would later be at the heart of the PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> strategy.

Like many good ideas, Sloan's changed dramatically over the next two decades, as he reduced his role at the Foundation, leadership changed, and the climate of early education in Washington state improved dramatically. Over the past nine years his ideas have matured with the support of a second donor. Instead of building more schools, the Foundation spread broader ideas and lessons about PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> around Seattle and Washington state. Today, the Foundation still supports only one school, but that school is one of the best PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> models in the nation.

The power of Sloan's idea lay not in inspiring a network of similar schools, but rather in creating a working model that showed policymakers, principals, teachers, and nonprofits why linking PreKindergarten with the first four grades of elementary school (K-3) matters. In the process, it produced leaders who championed one of the most promising ideas in the current debate over education reform.

<sup>1</sup> The school became the Beginning with Children Charter School in 2001. The Beginning with Children Foundation created a second charter school in Brooklyn in 2000, and a third charter school is awaiting approval to open in the 2012-13 school year. See Beginning with Children Foundation online for more information <http://www.bwcf.org/history.php>.

# Lessons Learned

The New School Foundation and its ideas were far from an overnight success. Initially, community members resisted the Foundation's program. Its unprecedented partnership with the Seattle Public Schools strained and still strains at times. Change and success took far longer than many hoped. Ultimately, however, the Foundation succeeded. Student test scores rose, communities and families became engaged, and the idea of a more integrated PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> continuum spread. These struggles and successes hold lessons for foundations considering the next generation of investments that could expand this work around the country.

One of the central lessons is that the New School Foundation succeeded because it never gave up. The Foundation spent two decades in an arena—public elementary education reform—where

change often moves at a glacial pace, and foundations typically commit no more than a few years to a strategy. The New School Foundation learned, sometimes painfully, that it can take many years to make measurable change, even with substantial private investment. In fact, Sloan and his team spent six years opening their first school at T.T. Minor.

Since the doors of that school opened 13 years ago, the Foundation has learned another lesson. A single successful model coupled with strong leadership can be leveraged in many ways to build support for broader systemic change. In fact, models such as the New School Foundation laid the groundwork for the PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> movement in the state of Washington.

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# A Businessman Takes on Education

A veteran of corner offices and corporate boardrooms, Sloan was used to moving quickly. He began working on his idea for a school in 1992 and over the next few years assembled a diverse advisory group drawn from two of the region's most powerful institutions, the University of Washington and The Boeing Co., as well as the Pacific Northwest Ballet, a local elementary school, and a medical clinic. By far, his most important recruit was Seattle City Parks and Recreation director Holly Miller, who began helping Sloan develop the initiative in early 1996 and became the foundation's first Executive Director when it formally incorporated in 1998.

But when Sloan and Miller brought their idea to the Seattle Public Schools, it went nowhere. They proposed a partnership unprecedented in the history of Seattle schools. While wealthy donors often gave money to schools, Sloan and Miller wanted to go much further. They wanted to shape the school, and that type of partnership demanded a new level of cooperation and communication among donor, school district, and community, which took years to work out.

After years of trying to work out this new partnership, there was still no school. By 1996, Sloan felt he was banging his head against a wall and was close to giving up.

"You think it would be manna from heaven... It is not the case," Sloan said.

It took a new superintendent, John Stanford, to help Sloan break through.

Stanford was one of the most dynamic superintendents in recent Seattle history, a former U.S. Army major general who had spent his career in the military, not education. He met with Sloan during his first

months on the job, and roughly a year later the two men signed a deal.<sup>i</sup> Without Stanford's support, it is not clear when, or if, the Foundation would have created a new school in Seattle. It was an early example of the pivotal role superintendents and principals would play in PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> work over the next 15 years.<sup>2</sup>

"When he said, 'Let's do it,' he meant "Let's do it now," Sloan said.

'Now' became two years later because Sloan and Stanford had to overcome reservations from the Seattle School Board, parents, and staff at the school where Sloan would build his model<sup>ii</sup>: T.T. Minor Elementary, the worst-performing school in the district, where 85 percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunch.

Reservations turned into protests, and as the program prepared to open in 1997 it stalled. Members of the largely poor and African American community around T.T. Minor were concerned about a wealthy white businessman taking over their neighborhood school. Some worried Sloan wanted the school for white families.<sup>iii</sup> Picketers appeared in front of grocery stores Sloan once ran.

While Sloan said he had no ulterior motives beyond improving public education, the uproar became so loud the Foundation and school district backed off, postponing the launch for a year. They used those 12 months to reach out to the community and explain their mission.<sup>iv</sup>

"Both Sloan and the school system thought everyone would be excited about it. But schools have a culture and a constituency that we didn't fully respect. We got sideways with the community," Don

<sup>2</sup> See Foundation for Child Development Case Studies Marietta (2010) and Mead (2011), as well as the National Association of Elementary School Principals magazine, (2006, April), for more information on the role of superintendents and principals in PreK – 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Nielsen, a member of the School Board, said at the time.<sup>v</sup>

The delays and protests highlighted a lesson for future donors: When pursuing a partnership with a public school, an intentional and comprehensive communication and outreach campaign is critical. In this case, it paid off. By the time T.T. Minor opened the doors of its new PreK and Kindergarten classrooms in 1998, not only were those rooms full, there was a waiting list.

Sloan did not set a limit on his support for the next eight years, but there was a key condition. His investment supplemented school spending, it did not replace that money. For example, in fiscal year 2002, the school spent \$10,025 per student—\$4,973 contributed by the Foundation and \$5,052 by the school district, an amount consistent with the district's per pupil spending at similar schools.

Even with a more supportive community, plenty of challenges remained. During the first three years, the school struggled with the Foundation's ambitious agenda, according to an outside review conducted by University of Washington researchers, "Lessons Learned: The First Seven Years of The New School Foundation Program at T.T. Minor and the New School @ South Shore." In addition, there were problems between the new and established programs within T.T. Minor, "strained relations between the school, the school district, and the foundation," and leadership issues within the school, according to the review.

With a new principal, Gloria Mitchell, the school stabilized in 2001<sup>vi</sup> and success began to show in rising test scores. (See test scores box.) A decade after Sloan had the idea for an alternative public elementary school, his first model was finally underway.



## Rising Scores at T.T. Minor and South Shore School

The most watched indicators of a school's progress are its students' scores on standardized tests. Overall, students' scores on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) at T.T. Minor Elementary were rising before The New School Foundation's investments ended in 2008. At South Shore School, test scores are also improving.

At T.T. Minor, reading scores of Fourth Grade students rose dramatically between 1998 and 2005, and much of the increase occurred after 2002. In 2002, only 15 percent of the school's Fourth Graders met the state standard, but then tripled to 57 percent in 2005, a 42 percentage point increase that was far larger than the 13 point increase among students across the Seattle School District. The 57 percent of T.T. Minor students who passed the benchmark reading test was still below the district-wide 77 percent.

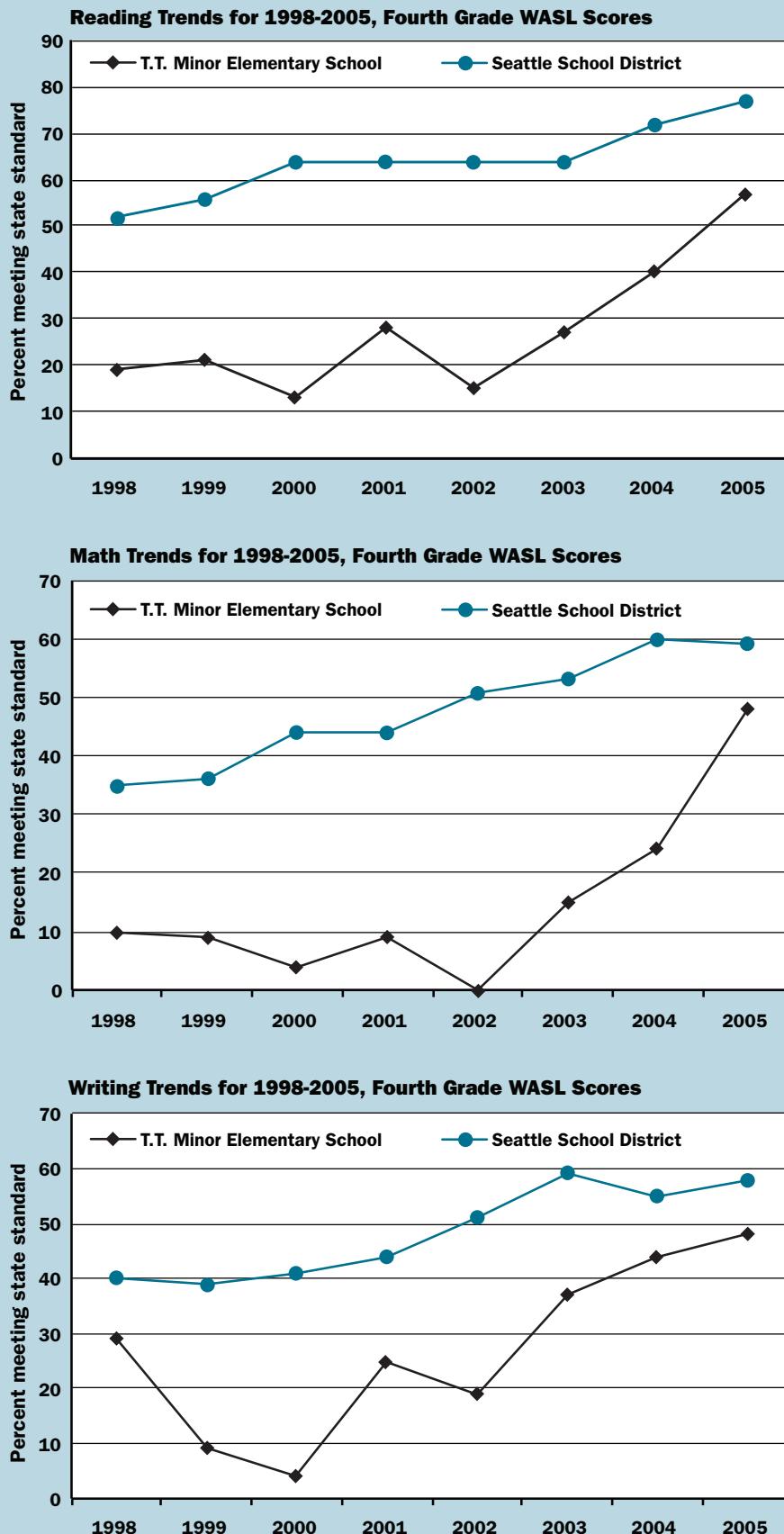
Math test scores of Fourth Grade students also rose over the same period at T.T. Minor. The percentage of students who met the WASL math standard rose from 10 percent in 1998 to 48 percent in 2005, outpacing the increase of 24 percentage points across the Seattle School District during the same period. But, the school's 48 percent of passing students still lagged the 57 percent of students district-wide who met the math benchmark in 2005.

On the standardized writing test, T.T. Minor students also made progress. The percentage of students reaching the state benchmark went from 29 percent in 1998 to 48 percent in 2005. During the same time period, the percentage of Seattle School District students passing the writing test rose from 40 percent to 58 percent.

South Shore School (formerly New School):

- Fourth grade students were 11 percentage points more likely to reach state benchmarks in math and four percentage points more likely to hit reading benchmarks than students from similar backgrounds attending other Seattle schools.
- At South Shore School, students who enrolled before First Grade were more likely to meet benchmarks than students who did not benefit from the early education program. Students who enrolled in PreKindergarten, and Kindergarten were six percentage points more likely to meet the Third Grade WASL benchmark in math and 12 percentage points more likely to meet the benchmark in reading than students who started later.
- Students who attended South Shore in PreK or Kindergarten were eight percentage points more likely to meet the Third Grade benchmark for math, and six percentage points more likely to reach the reading benchmark, compared to all Seattle Public Schools Third Graders.
- For every 100 South Shore Third Graders, an additional 6.4 students met or exceeded the Third Grade math benchmark and an additional 4.0 students met or exceeded the reading benchmark than would have been expected had these students attended a different school.

(Edited excerpts from "Early Evidence of Learning Gains at Seattle's South Shore School" by ECONorthwest, January, 2010. The New School Foundation commissioned the evaluation.)



(Source: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction)

# Learning From Implementation

## Lessons from T.T. Minor and New School:

- Strong leadership is critical to program success.  
(For the principals, successful leadership included a combination of administrative experience in working with the school district, clarity about their goals for the program, commitment to implementing them, and clarity about the role of principal.)
- Clarify the program's goals, objectives and components among the partners and stakeholders, and secure agreement for accomplishing them.
- Develop a detailed plan for implementing the program at the district and school levels.
- Be aware that there can be too much of a good thing. Consider allowing new partners to "phase in" the multiple program components and be cautious about overwhelming schools with extra opportunities.
- Ensure that the school supports the new program through its training and professional development opportunities and parent involvement in students' academic and social success.
- Ensure that the school's administrative/management and accountability structure supports the model.
- Clarify the decision-making structure and process among program participants at all levels—Foundation board and staff, principal, school staff, and district.
- Design the evaluation to reflect the goals and objectives, and measure the outcomes of the program.
- Outline a strategy for sustaining the program (or parts of the program) beyond the initial funding period.

(Source: Edited excerpts from "Lessons Learned: The First Seven Years of The New School Foundation at T.T. Minor and the New School @ South Shore.")

T.T. Minor was supposed to be the beginning, a success that inspired like-minded philanthropists, organizations, and companies to support more schools around Seattle. But when Sloan called on a "who's who" of Seattle's wealthiest in 2001, he found no takers.

Then a multimillionaire he did not call decided to call him.

This anonymous donor was attracted by the turnkey nature of the Foundation's established program, which could quickly be applied to a second school. Two years after the donor and Foundation began exploring the idea, they opened a second school in the Rainier Beach neighborhood of South Seattle. Originally called New School, the name was later changed to South Shore School.

The school, however, was not a clone of T.T. Minor. Both the Foundation and the school district learned from early mistakes. Rather than creating a new program within an existing school, this time the Foundation created a truly new school, opening three PreK and two Kindergarten classes in an aging former middle school with a leaky roof and poor ventilation. The Foundation also chose a different community. At South Shore School, 50 percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunch and 30 percent were bilingual in 2005, while at T.T. Minor 85 percent could receive those meals and none reported speaking two languages. And South Shore never operated under an extended school day and abandoned an extended school year after three years.

Once again, the Foundation supplemented public funding. In fiscal 2004, when the school ran from PreK to 1<sup>st</sup> Grade with roughly 150 students, it contributed \$1.36 million to the school. The money supported PreK, Full-Day Kindergarten, smaller class sizes (K-3), assistant teachers, professional development, and non-classroom teaching positions. The funds also supported the use of the HighScope curriculum, developed originally as part of the Ypsilanti Perry Preschool intervention; longitudinal studies of Perry are widely cited as evidence for the lasting effects of PreKindergarten programs. The same year, the school received \$481,832 in public funding.

During the next seven years, the Foundation scaled back its annual grants in an effort to create a more replicable model that was harder to challenge as simply the result of generous outside support. By 2011, the organization gave only \$1 million to the school, which now had more than four times as many students.

The overall relationship between the donor and school also was different. At T.T. Minor, the Foundation operated more like a co-manager. At South Shore it was a philanthropic partner, though one with considerable influence because it donated more than \$1 million a year.

But some of the same challenges remained. At times, the relationship between the Foundation and the school district was strained. Part of the strain was born of the differing missions of the New School Foundation, a small and flexible organization with only three employees, and the Seattle School District, a massive bureaucracy serving more than 45,000 students. For example, while the New School Foundation aspired to build a model elementary school, the district expanded South Shore to a

PreK-8 and added a program for students with emotional and behavioral needs. These are basic needs of a public school district, but beyond the Foundation's scope.

This tension spotlights an important lesson: Private-driven change at a public elementary school can force school leaders to perform a delicate balancing act. They must weigh the foundation's goals against the needs of their school district, and that can slow progress.

"It is very difficult within the confines of an urban public school district to affect the kind of change you want," the anonymous donor observed.

Over the years, the relationship between the school district and Foundation improved, as both became more comfortable with the arrangement. And even with these challenges, the school began to show signs of success as student scores on standardized tests rose.

Overall, The New School Foundation was creating a more integrated PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> continuum, according to parents, teachers, and school administrators.

"No matter what socioeconomic bracket you came from you received really high-quality PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> instruction: smaller

class size, kids read(ing) earlier than you see in more traditional schools, higher student-to-staff ratio. We could intervene even faster," one former principal said. "South Shore was able to put PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> on the map for Washington state and the nation."

But as the South Shore School gained its footing, T.T. Minor stumbled and fell. In 2005, T.T. Minor landed on a list of schools targeted for potential closure by the Seattle School District.<sup>vii</sup> Three years later T.T. Minor closed its doors.

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# Creating a Climate for Scale-Up

As The New School Foundation quietly built one model of a PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> system—before anyone used the term—in South Seattle, politicians and policymakers were creating an environment that allowed the broader ideas behind PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> to spread around Washington.

By the turn of this century, Washington had aspects of a good early learning system—a state-funded PreKindergarten system (the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, or ECEAP), a statewide Child Care Resource and Referral Network, and growing public outreach on the importance of early education<sup>viii</sup>. State supported ECEAP also expanded, as slots in the programs rose to 5,804 in 2004, from 2,047 in 1990. But the system was far from comprehensive and lagged behind much of the country in its overall scale and quality.

The election of Democratic Governor Christine Gregoire in 2004, however, set in motion investments, new programs, and appointments that began to fill major gaps in the system. Early learning emerged as one of Gregoire's priorities when her staff began turning research supporting it into concrete proposals. Many proposals supported better integration of childcare, and PreK with early elementary grades. Together these changes created an infrastructure and an audience receptive to New School's work and ideas.

Within a year of taking office, Governor Gregoire launched Washington Learns, a steering committee that laid the foundation of her education work by conducting a complete review of the state's education system. When the governor and state legislature made early learning one of the committee's three areas of focus, along with K-12 and higher education, they gave the state's fledgling PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> movement a boost.

Their inclusion of early learning signaled a paradigm shift in the public view of public education in Washington. PreKindergarten was now viewed as part of the educational pipeline. This was the first time early learning and K-12, which operated under different policy, funding, and regulatory systems, were brought together on a comprehensive statewide policy level, according to Bea Kelleigh, former director of the Early Learning and Family Support Division for the City of Seattle.



The decision meant a lot—Washington Learns was not one of those powerless public commissions designed to give politicians cover on issues where substantial changes appeared unlikely. Over the next two years, the state legislature began to remake the early education landscape by enacting many of the commission’s recommendations.<sup>ix</sup> In the process, it created tools to connect PreK with elementary school.

Key changes that supported PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> work were:

- Creation of a cabinet-level agency, the Department of Early Learning. The agency focuses on the earliest years of a child’s life, including infant and toddler development, but also builds bridges between PreK and early elementary grades.
- Development of a Kindergarten readiness process (Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills, or WaKIDS) that encourages Kindergarten teachers to engage families of their incoming students, understand their students social/emotional, literacy, cognitive, and physical skills, and collaborate with early learning teachers and providers.
- Adoption of voluntary Full-Day Kindergarten, initially in high-poverty schools. Schools that adopt the program are required to connect with early learning providers.<sup>x</sup>
- Construction of a comprehensive 10-year Early Learning Plan, which eventually contained proposals to align PreK and K-3 practices and develop a longitudinal data system that spans PreKindergarten through higher education.
- Support for a new public-private partnership, Thrive by Five Washington. The partnership focuses on mobilizing long-term statewide support for early learning and improving early education. Thrive acts in partnership with both the state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), which oversees public K-12 education, and the Department of Early Learning.

One of the reasons the state legislature enacted the steering committee’s ideas was legislators themselves received an education on the importance of early learning from leading researchers. For example, University of Washington professor Patricia Kuhl, a world-renowned expert on brain development, drove down to the state capitol a half-dozen times to testify. She told legislators that school readiness begins at birth and explained the science behind that claim. She discussed the relationships between social and economic risk factors in families and brain development in children that makes high-quality early education so important.

Harvard University’s Dr. Jack Shonkoff, co-founder of the Center on the Developing Child, also flew out to brief legislators. Shonkoff provided a boost when the effort to create the Department of Early Learning ran into trouble, according to State Representative Ruth Kagi, one of the legislative architects of early learning reform.

“We have paid attention to the research,” Kagi said.

In 2007, a landmark study also showed that an educational continuum that runs from PreK through 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade could improve lives. The study of the 44-year-old Child-Parent Center program in Chicago, one of the longest running PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> systems in the country, found its students were more likely to finish high school and attend college and less likely to land in jail and become disabled 20 years later, compared to a control group.<sup>xi<sup>3</sup></sup>

The research-fueled conversation in the legislature was just the beginning. In 2009, Governor Gregoire took arguably her biggest step to integrate early learning and K-3 in 2009 when she appointed Bette Hyde to run the Department of Early Learning.

<sup>3</sup> In June 2011, researchers updated their findings and reported 28 percent fewer students had been incarcerated, 9 percent more had completed high school and 28 percent fewer had abused drugs and alcohol a quarter of a century later compared to the control group.

## Lessons from Bremerton

Before joining the Department of Early Learning, Hyde was Superintendent of the Bremerton School District, the state's first district to implement a system resembling PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> that connected the city's loosely organized collection of PreKindergartens and childcare providers with its public school system. Bremerton was one of the state's leaders in PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> work, though it did not use that term when it started.

Although she had sent a group to visit South Shore School, Hyde's approach to PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> was different. Instead of New School's strategy of integrating PreK and elementary school under one roof, Bremerton formed partnerships with the region's childcare providers, Head Start programs, and PreKindergartens. They started informally talking over coffee and cookies, and eventually shared curricula, professional development, and resources in a more formal collaboration.

Once Bremerton launched the Early Childhood Care and Education Group in 2001<sup>xii</sup>, it quickly yielded impressive results. The percentage of incoming Kindergartners who needed remedial reading help dropped from 40 percent to below five percent within a year. By 2009, 66 percent of incoming Kindergartners knew their letters, up from only four percent in 2001.<sup>xiii</sup> The collaborative strategy also showed a district did not need to spend tens of millions of dollars to build an integrated system. In 2010, the Bremerton School District spent \$60,000 to support 840 children in local PreKindergartens and help prepare them for Kindergarten.

It is hard to overstate the importance of Hyde's appointment to the development of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> in Washington. When she took over the Department Early Learning she brought with her this broader vision of public education, one that encompassed both early learning and K-12. In the next few years, Hyde emerged as one of Washington's leading supporters of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> systems.

"By picking Bette Hyde she (Governor Gregoire) brought both worlds together," said Mary Seaton, former director of Early Learning at Seattle Public Schools.

Gregoire also appeared to signal that better integration of PreK and K-3 should be a priority in future efforts to improve the state's education system. "The fact of the matter is that there isn't anybody in education now that doesn't understand: If you can get it right, PreK to Kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, that kid is going to succeed. If you don't get it right then the chances of that child succeeding are greatly diminished," Gregoire said on National Public Radio's Seattle affiliate, KUOW last year. By 2007, Washington had moved from the back of the pack in early learning to near the front, with a new governance structure at the Department of Early Learning, a legislature increasingly committed to early education, and a growing list of other improvements.

“Policymakers and educators were dipping their toes into this work. They were starting to believe it. They were starting to experiment with it,” said Elaine VonRosenstiel, an early advocate for investment in early learning who served as a consultant to the state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

As part of this experimentation, state policymakers began to build more bridges between PreK and K-3 by developing a Kindergarten assessment program

and a comprehensive Early Learning Plan, which was a blueprint for future changes. Over the next three years, a small group of like-minded leaders at government agencies and foundations, including the New School Foundation’s Executive Director Laura Kohn, worked to build a network that could expand PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> ideas around the rest of the state.

But first, they had to learn they were working on a concept called PreK-3<sup>rd</sup>.



## Building PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Networks

One of the most interesting elements of the New School Foundation's early work was that its leaders did not view it as a PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> strategy. Instead, they saw it as best practices for an elementary school: Start students in PreKindergarten with a lot of support and well-trained teachers using an enriched curriculum.

"We didn't have an umbrella term for it," Kohn said.

Although the idea of integrating early learning and K-3 wasn't new—it went back at least a half-century—the term only began emerging in 2003. The Foundation for Child Development (FCD), a small New York City-based philanthropy, had been developing the concept for two years, refining it as a grant-making strategy that could improve school readiness and narrow the achievement gap between low-income and higher-income students. "It provides a framework for supporting institutions to address school readiness, transition, and accountability issues by recognizing that all children must be prepared to succeed in school by Grade 3, and that it is the responsibility of adult educators to nurture both cognitive and social development," FCD wrote in a 2003 letter.

Initially, FCD called its idea P-3 and then renamed it PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> in 2009. Whichever term it used, FCD President Ruby Takanishi recognized it in the classrooms, curriculum, and mission of South Shore School. Soon after discovering the New School Foundation on the Internet, Takanishi flew to Seattle in 2005 to visit its school and meet with Kohn, who had been on her job all of five weeks.

In Kohn, Takanishi found a kindred spirit. Both women were strategic thinkers, steeped in public policy, who believed in the importance of connecting the two often separate worlds of PreK and early elementary school. In South Shore School, Takanishi saw possibility, a chance to show people a PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> school in action that was growing and producing measurable results.

"FCD saw a really ripe opportunity with the positioning of the New School Foundation and Laura's personality," said Kristie Kauerz, program director of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education who has worked with Washington agencies on early learning issues and has studied PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> work in the state. "FCD saw this as a real opportunity to build a model site, make concrete and make visible this somewhat conceptual idea."

The New School Foundation and Kohn also served as a gateway for the Foundation for Child Development and Takanishi to connect with the growing number of Washington school districts working on ways to integrate early learning and early elementary school.

"She sent lots of people out here," Kohn recalled.

In return, the New York City-based organization offered the tiny New School Foundation national exposure, guidance, and connections to leaders and similar efforts around the country, which helped the Foundation develop its next role as an advocate. Over the next few years, The New School Foundation emerged as an axis around which PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> work orbited in the state of Washington.

This type of personal relationship between two individuals, as opposed to organizational partnerships, played a critical role in the expansion of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> work around Washington over the next five years.

Kohn exerted a sort of gravitational pull that helped to connect an expanding roster of educators, public officials, and foundation grant managers working on different approaches to coordinating childcare, PreKindergarten, and elementary school.

When Kohn took the helm of the New School Foundation in 2005, she had the background to help connect this group. In the previous seven years, Kohn had served as Director of Education for the city of Seattle, an advisor on education issues to Governor Gary Locke, and finally an advocacy consultant for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which was taking a bigger role in early education around Washington.

When T.T. Minor closed in 2008, Kohn used her experience and her connections to build support for the idea of a continuum from PreK through 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade. She connected people, set up meetings, referred associates to new jobs, and relentlessly advocated for the idea. She was pushing for the broader idea of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup>, not specifically the Foundation's model, which offered lessons but was limited by the fact that it benefited from substantial private support.

"She put the motivating factor to these people to come together consistently over time to make this a priority," said Harvard's Kauerz. "It seems so simple, yet I think this is one of the magical ingredients. You need someone who rallies the troops and brings them together."

In the fall of 2007, Kohn had coffee with another player, Mary Seaton, who had recently become the first-ever Director of Early Learning at the state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

(OSPI), which oversees K-12 education. The office created the job, in part, because it became more involved in early education in the wake of Washington Learns.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and Seaton worked on a linchpin of the statewide PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> effort with two new programs designed to strengthen and broaden the connection between early learning and Kindergarten. The agency was developing a school readiness tool, known as WaKIDS, with the Department of Early Learning that would encourage teachers to engage families for a better understanding of incoming students and

to collaborate with early learning teachers and providers. This pilot project also offered a sobering view of school readiness. More than a third of the 1,760 Washington children in its study were not ready for Kindergarten—they performed below expected skill levels, and nearly half were below expectations in language, communication, and literacy.<sup>xiv</sup>

Seaton and OSPI also worked with three predominantly low-income schools on state-funded demonstration projects to create smoother continuums

between Kindergarten and 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade through smaller class sizes, instructional coaches, and professional development. These schools also tried to improve connections between elementary schools and local PreKindergartens.

With both these projects, Seaton developed building blocks of a PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> model, but she was involved with another effort even closer to the heart of the strategy.

**"She put the motivating factor to these people to come together consistently over time to make this a priority," said Harvard's Kauerz. "It seems so simple, yet I think this is one of the magical ingredients. You need someone who rallies the troops and brings them together."**

# The World's Biggest Foundation Takes a Supporting Role

In 2007, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation was preparing to engage the world of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> by developing more than \$2 million in grants to support Washington school districts working to better coordinate childcare, preschool, and PreK with early elementary school. (The foundation awarded a \$1.18 million grant that year to another of Washington's PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> pioneers, Toppenish School District.) While the total amount was a drop in the bucket for a foundation with a \$37 billion endowment, it was a major investment in and important support for the state's fledgling PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> movement.

In August 2008, the Gates Foundation awarded five grants that supported a range of efforts, including:

- Building a common vision of early learning among preschool instructors, early elementary teachers, and community providers in South Bend, WA.
- Aligning early literacy and language development from birth through second Grade in Nooksack Valley, WA.
- Expanding a Kindergarten readiness program in Sedro Woolley, WA.

Source: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

To facilitate the grant work, the Gates Foundation awarded a \$150,000-a-year renewable contract to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Under this deal, OSPI offered technical and training support to the foundation's six new grantees and others working on PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> around the state. The agency helped grantees learn what was needed to build these systems and expand capacity for the work, according to Jodi Haavig, who was in charge of the grants at the Gates Foundation. The contract also paid roughly a quarter of Seaton's salary.

The Gates Foundation sent teams from each district to the Harvard Graduate School of Education's PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Institute<sup>4</sup> to learn more about the educational model, supporting research, and why an aligned system was developmentally appropriate. At the conference, Washington's progress was obvious. Its teams were better organized and larger than the others, according to FCD's Takanishi, who also attended the institute.

In 2009, the Gates Foundation awarded another grant, this time to the Bremerton School District to train staff in other districts around Washington on how to engage and integrate early learning providers, PreKindergarten programs with elementary schools.

The Gates Foundation's support was a milestone for Washington's emerging PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> movement. As the world's biggest foundation, its grant-making decisions draw local, national, and global attention.

But the Gates Foundation backed into PreK-3<sup>rd</sup>.

Three years before the Gates Foundation awarded its initial PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> grants, it approved a more ambitious investment in early learning that became the 10-year Early Learning Initiative in Washington, which included developing comprehensive early education systems in two low-income communities, White Center and East Yakima. The initiative was the Gates Foundation's largest investment in early education to date.

While this move was ambitious, it was not specifically a PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> strategy. The grant work was largely focused on birth through Kindergarten, not through 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade. Two years after the project launched, the Gates Foundation began looking for other ways to support early learning around the state and noticed

<sup>4</sup> The Foundation for Child Development and Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation supported the Harvard Graduate School of Education's PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Institute as part of a national strategy.

that many school districts were working on the issue. However, the work did not appear to have a common organizing principle.

Gates Foundation analysts thought K-12 systems offered opportunities for new strategic investments in early learning, but they wanted ideas that would organize their grants. Over the next three years, the PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> continuum emerged as one of those ideas.

“I don’t think we realized the extent (to which) communities all go their own ways without some organizing principle,” said Valisa Smith, who was in charge of early learning grant work at the foundation during this period. “If we are going to work with school districts, how do we do that consistently? And P-3 is a good place to start.”

This approach fit the Gates Foundation’s broader goal of supporting systems that would be self-sustaining after a defined period of investment. In the P-3 arena that meant the Foundation supported improving quality, such as curriculum and professional development, but not teacher salaries or direct

services. Over the next five years, the Foundation invested \$8.49 million in P-3 work around Washington. As it refined its strategy, it became clear it wanted to support P-3 strategies, but not become the long-term leader of the effort.

The Gates Foundation also did not appear interested in funding the creation of another early education model, similar to the New School Foundation’s work and to what it supported in White Center and East Yakima. Instead, it invested in school districts that were already working on integrating early learning and early elementary systems by expanding their capacity, and then awarded grants to broader Education Service Districts, which encompass multiple school districts.

The time for models was ending in Washington. Leading players at the New School Foundation, the Department of Early Learning, OSPI, the Gates Foundation, and the Seattle School District began thinking about how to turn models at South Shore School, in Bremerton, and elsewhere around the state into broader systems.

## A Video Is Worth a Thousand Issue Briefs

Tours and symposiums are limited to those who can travel to a school or conference. After its symposium, the New School Foundation started working on a tool with a broader reach: a mini-documentary.

While many nonprofits produce videos to highlight important work, “PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade: A New Beginning for American Education” was different. In nine minutes, this film made a compelling case for a better continuum from PreK through 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade with scenes from South Shore School’s classrooms, interspersed with comments from teachers, students, school officials, and experts, all set to a powerful soundtrack. It was a joint effort of director Brian Quist, Foundation for Child Development’s Mark Bogosian, the New School Foundation’s Laura Kohn, and board member Lisa Fitzhugh. They found a new way to leverage the work of one school. Today, people carry this short, powerful version of the South Shore School and PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> to conferences around the state and nation.

“I think you can’t see that video and not pause [to consider]: What can I do now?” said Department of Early Learning director Bette Hyde, who says she is regularly approached at national conferences by people who recognize her from the video.

## Seeing PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> in Practice

By 2008, the New School Foundation had an established model, and it began pursuing Stuart Sloan's original goal of replication, but in a different way. Instead of building new schools, it began to spread the ideas and broader concept of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> around Washington. One of its first steps was to partner with the state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to hold a two-day symposium that spring. On the first day, they brought together school administrators, teachers, and other staff from school districts that were already connecting early learning and K-3 to learn about practices and research behind their strategies. On the second day, state legislators, nonprofit officials, foundation officers, and policy analysts joined the conference to learn about PreK-3<sup>rd</sup>.

As part of the introduction, this group toured South Shore School, where they saw one example of the educational continuum in the school's classrooms, hallways, and cafeteria. This tour "was a chance for Laura [Kohn] to say, 'Let's build on that,'" Seaton said.

At the symposium, the New School Foundation embraced a new role. It used its school to show educators and policymakers one way PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> works and why it's so important. It was one thing to produce reports on test scores and a coordinated curriculum. It was another to watch two PreKindergarten students quickly and quietly resolve a dispute over Legos, exemplifying the school's focus on social/emotional development, and then see photographs of every Kindergarten family

next to a classroom door, proof of the school's commitment to parental engagement. Over the next three years, a steady stream of legislators, educators, nonprofit leaders, and foundation staff visited South Shore School to learn what PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> was in a way that was more powerful than the issue briefs, reports, and testimony that are often used to shape state and federal education policy.

"They were able to help people know what it looks like and sounds like and feels like," said Christine Maxwell, head of The New Schools Project at the Chicago-based Erikson Institute.

Teachers, principals, and school administrators also visited to learn how the school implemented these ideas.

"What we want to actually do is see it. We want to talk to the Kindergarten teachers. We think it's going to provide the kind of learning that is critical to leadership development, professional development," said Swati Adarkar, executive director of the Portland, Oregon-based Children's Institute, who brought a team of educators to tour the school in 2011 and is developing early education strategies in Oregon. "I think in 20, 30 years what we will find is that those blueprints, those models, really helped shape the future."

## South Shore Today

One of the first things visitors to South Shore School are likely notice is the peace and quiet.

On a spring day, the halls of South Shore hum with quiet activity, reflecting the school's emphasis on socio-emotional development. Nearly all of the students are in class, and teachers direct the few wandering students back to their classrooms in one of three wings that shoot off from the circular cafeteria-common area.

After spending its initial years in an aging middle school, South Shore is now in a two-year-old modern building of brown brick and gray shingles with a design that reflects the PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> concept. In one wing, Kindergarten classrooms run down one side and PreKindergarten classrooms line the other, anchored at the end by a glass-walled transitions office, staffed with counselors who help students move from PreKindergarten to Kindergarten.

Inside one of those classrooms, Miwa Takahashi's 18 PreK students work quietly. A few children try on firemen and pilot costumes at the dress-up station, and two others feed dolls plastic strawberries for lunch. After one student grabs a Lego from another student, it takes about ten seconds for him to return the toy.

Parental engagement is a priority. Teachers visit each incoming student's family at home before the school year begins. Classes are small, 18 students in PreK and Kindergarten, and use an enriched curriculum that includes music, art, and socio-emotional development. Both grades blend the HighScope approach with the Seattle School District's curriculum, so students start Kindergarten with skills they will need for the coming year.

"They know what school is like," said Huyen Lam, who teaches Kindergarten at South Shore. "I just take it from there and [they] skyrocket."

Over the last nine years, South Shore's enrollment soared from 102 students to 644 this year, creating challenges for the four principals who ran the school previously. They were not only responsible for developing a model PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> system, but also adding a grade each year as the school expanded to Eighth Grade, with little or no extra administrative staff. The PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> work also meant more assessments and visitors.

"We just grew so fast that every time we tried to calibrate our work there just wasn't enough time and there (were) other things competing," said a former principal. "The change was coming faster than we could implement the system(s) to support the changes."

When South Shore's current principal, Keisha Scarlett, took over in September 2010, she worked on quickly building a relationship with the New School Foundation's executive director, Laura Kohn, including a common vision of early learning's role in the school.

Over the last 11 years, South Shore received more than \$13 million from the Foundation. But, as its support dwindles after Third Grade, when classes expand to 28 to 30 students with new arrivals, who have not benefited from South Shore's approach, the transition can be abrupt, according to Anita Koyier-Mwamba, whose Fourth Grade daughter has been at the school since Kindergarten.

"When we get to the Fourth Grade, there is a tremendous shift and it feels almost like an abandonment," said Koyier-Mwamba.

The Foundation focuses on giving students a platform in those first five grades, from PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, based on research that shows progress through Third Grade often leads to better school performance in later years. While Koyier-Mwamba wishes the Foundation would invest a little more in the upper grades, she agrees the early grades are strong. "PreK-through 3<sup>rd</sup> is outstanding, absolutely outstanding."

## New School Foundation Broadens its Mission

The film and symposium were examples of the New School Foundation's expanding mission. Even as its executive director worked on the film in the spring of 2009, she helped to plan a second conference later that year. The Starting Strong conference showcased local and national PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> work and focused on four areas: Leadership, instructional practice, community coalitions and collaboration, and family partnerships. It brought together superintendents, principals, and school staff who were working with national experts to integrate early learning systems and elementary schools in Washington.

Starting Strong was a breakthrough for Washington's PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> effort. Attendance jumped to roughly 400 people from 130 who attended the symposium. Organizer Mary Seaton received emails at 1 a.m. from people asking if there was any space left. Equally important, the conference was a turning point for the New School Foundation. It was now working on a statewide level, and its ideas were reaching a broader audience, according to FCD's Takanishi. The New School Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Department of Early Learning (DEL), OSPI, Thrive by Five Washington, and The Boeing Co. all sponsored the conference and now worked on integrating PreKindergarten and the early elementary grades.

This momentum was captured by a seemingly innocuous event as the Starting Strong conference wound down. At its closing luncheon, the heads of the Department of Early Learning, OSPI, and Thrive by Five Washington took the stage to sign a joint resolution that committed their agencies to work together to build a leading early learning system that spanned birth to age eight. The resolution spelled out goals of school readiness, health,

social/emotional and cognitive development for children, and support for families and educators. It also outlined the need for accountability, identified priorities, and called for quarterly meetings. These goals were impressive, but joint resolutions often lack the teeth to make real changes, and instead simply convey a group's intent.

When the three officials signed this joint resolution, however, members of the audience not only applauded, they rose in a standing ovation, and some started to cry. If the 400-strong attendance indicated growing interest in PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> around Washington, this emotional reaction signaled the depth of desire to expand it.

Before this effort, early learning and K-3 largely existed in separate worlds, with different funding streams, rules, and governance structures. The joint resolution declared the two worlds should merge in some way and acknowledged the importance of PreK and childcare in the state's evolving vision of education, according to Seaton.

"That K-12 said, 'We have got to have you. We can't do it without you' was huge for early learning," said the Gates Foundation's Haavig.

During the next two years, the New School Foundation, Department of Early Learning, OSPI, and the Gates Foundation tried to bring the two worlds even closer with new partnerships, grants, and initiatives.

The New School Foundation set its sights higher by proposing to expand PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> practices within the Seattle School District. It wanted to work with the district and city of Seattle to add integrated PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> programs at Seattle's roughly 20 Title I schools,

which serve low-income communities, within five years, according to its 2009 strategic plan. Under the plan, the Foundation would be the “catalyst of the partnership.” It would lead development, become the primary source of technical assistance, offer principal and school training and start-up assistance, and share best practices. It also would advocate for PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> on a statewide level, including calling for the strategy to be added to the state’s definition of basic education.<sup>xv</sup>

But the Foundation was not proposing to copy the entire South Shore School model throughout Seattle. There were lessons to be learned from its school, but there also were limits, since it received more than \$1 million a year in private funding.

On the state level, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction renewed its \$150,000 annual contract with the Gates Foundation, a decision that allowed the agency to continue helping school districts implement PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> strategies. In addition, the agency continued to work on its Kindergarten assessment pilot program and goals spelled out in the joint resolution.

The Gates Foundation, meanwhile, expanded its grant making. In 2009 and 2010, it awarded \$5 million in grants. This time, it gave \$1.99 million to five educational service districts—broader agencies that support multiple public school districts—and \$3.24 million to eight districts.

“After the first couple years of making grants directly to school districts, we began also investing at a regional level, through educational service districts, to support the development of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> infrastructure in Washington,” Haavig said.

This cooperation culminated in an ambitious bid for an Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) award, a federal competition run by the U.S. Department of Education that supports new approaches to closing the achievement gap and helping high-need students.<sup>xvi</sup>

Once again, the New School Foundation was a key player, working with the city of Seattle and the Toppenish, Bremerton and Seattle school districts on a proposal to expand PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> work to 30 new schools. The application also built on the Foundation’s 2009 strategic plan by proposing to study Seattle’s effort to expand PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> strategies.<sup>xvii</sup> They were not trying to replicate the Foundation’s strategy. Instead, the application focused on ideas that could be implemented using existing funding; data sharing between PreK and elementary schools; a quality instructional continuum across the levels through common professional development; and a focus on the whole child, which includes social/emotional, academic, and physical development. Class size reduction and additional teacher positions

were not featured due to concerns about sustainability.

Ultimately, the application fell short, but not by too much. It received 81.92 points out of a possible 100, placing 97<sup>th</sup> among nearly 1,700 applicants. Though the effort failed, it was an example of the growing coordination and potential of Washington’s expanding PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> network that was built over the last three years with conferences, targeted grants, a film, and this bid for federal aid.

“What I really give the New School credit for is they found a way to partner with the right people to have way more influence than that single voice and that relatively small foundation could have,” said former OSPI consultant Elaine VonRosenstiel.

## Focusing on Seattle

Even though the i3 bid failed, the New School Foundation, Seattle School district, and city did not give up. They decided to continue PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> efforts in Seattle on their own. In 2010, the parties developed a five-year plan to integrate PreK and the first four elementary grades at the city's poorest public schools. It would align standards, assessments, data systems, and tools, expand access to quality PreKindergarten and Kindergarten, create more seamless transitions, and improve support for children with higher needs.<sup>xviii</sup>

The idea was not to create copies of South Shore School around the district. Rather, it was to use lessons learned at that school, in Bremerton, Toppenish, and elsewhere around the state and nation, to better integrate Seattle's early learning providers and public K-3 system.

Once again, the New School Foundation's Kohn helped to pull parties together. She organized meetings between the city and the school district, which led to the creation of the Seattle PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Partnership. That partnership then brought in an outside consulting firm, Berk & Associates, to help develop and draft a plan. Kohn arranged a meeting between one of the architects of Bremerton's P-3 system, Linda Sullivan-Dudzic, and then-Seattle superintendent Maria Goodloe-Johnson on how PreK and K-3 could be aligned. The superintendent became a vocal supporter of the strategy.

"I believe that the single most powerful change we're going to make, the one that's going to have the largest and most long lasting impact on our kids, is to switch us from a K-12 system to a PreK-12 system," Goodloe-Johnson said in announcing Seattle's plan.

To help oversee this work, the New School Foundation recommended that Goodloe-Johnson and the district create a new position, Director of Early Learning for the Seattle School District. Then Kohn referred OSPI's Mary Seaton to the job. In late 2009, Seaton moved from her state job to the new city position, placing a public official with one of the strongest grasps of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> at the heart of an effort to expand that strategy in the state's largest school district.

"Laura and the New School Foundation...have played a large role in helping the school district think deeply" about PreK-3<sup>rd</sup>, said the city of Seattle's former director of the Division of Early Learning and Family Support, Bea Kelleigh.

During the next 18 months, the Seattle PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Partnership produced a five-year plan spurred by the launch of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> efforts at an additional Title I school, and implemented professional development for PreK through 1<sup>st</sup> Grade teachers in 18 schools. The work also drew national attention. The National League of Cities chose Seattle to host the first of four community conversations on August 12, 2010, about how to better coordinate early learning and elementary school.

The district will take steps in the 2011-12 school year, such as expanding coordinated professional development among PreKindergarten and K-3 teachers. Unlike the 5,500-student Bremerton School District and 640-student South Shore School, the Seattle School District is a large and complex system with more than 47,000 students.

The initiative presents organizational challenges for school administrators and early education leaders, who must connect the highly decentralized world of early learning and the defined structures of K-3, according to Seaton. There is no magic bullet or single model for this type of work. Instead, leaders at individual schools will have to construct, review, and refine systems over years to ensure their approach fits the unique needs of their community.

It is an ambitious effort. The New School Foundation, Seattle, and the school district are working with two different systems, PreKindergarten and public education, which have separate funding streams, curriculums, and widely divergent pay scales, in what some say is the most challenging school district in the state.

But there is a big potential payoff.

"If we can make this happen in one of the most diverse districts in the country, there are no excuses for any district in the country," Seaton said.



# An Uncertain Future

2011 began with promise as the state's PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> leaders gathered in a conference room at Seattle Public Schools headquarters for a summit in February. But tight state and federal budgets threatened to sap their momentum.

It was the first time these roughly two dozen city, state, and nonprofit officials were in the same room. They discussed better ways to align state and Seattle efforts and set goals. The meeting drew everyone from the New School Foundation's Laura Kohn and interim Seattle Superintendent Susan Enfield to Washington's Department of Early Learning chief Bette Hyde and Harvard's Kristie Kauerz. One of the most striking aspects was the level of cooperation in the room, collaboration that has helped transform the state into one of the leaders of the PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> movement.

"A lot of people are looking at Washington right now," Kauerz noted during the meeting.

The group had a blueprint to guide their work. The month before the meeting, the three lead agencies, DEL, OSPI, and Thrive by Five Washington, released a list of 11 priorities for the state's Early Learning Plan for 2011. Four strategies focused on PreK-3<sup>rd</sup>:

- Align PreK and K-3 instruction and practices.
- Continue development of the state's Kindergarten readiness pilot project, WaKIDS.
- Increase Full-Day state-funded Kindergarten. Collect data on its effectiveness and increase support for teachers, administrators, and staff.
- Develop a longitudinal data system that spans preschool through higher education (P-20).<sup>xix</sup>

"Early Learning Joint Resolution Partnership: 2011 Priority Strategies Early Learning Plan"

These priorities were chosen because early education leaders believed the work could be accomplished in the current era of tight state and school district budgets. The Department of Early Learning, for example, already secured a \$2.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education for the P-20 data system.

Only six months earlier, the three agencies had released the final 10-Year Early Learning Plan, which made it clear that future work would cover both early learning and K-3.

The plan "encourages breaking down the barriers of traditional silos based on children's narrow age ranges, old funding patterns, different types of development (i.e., physical, mental, social/emotional, etc.) and the historic distinctions between a child's first five years and the school years. The plan creates a comprehensive system of care, education, supports, and services that recognizes that a child's success in school and life is strongly influenced by the foundations that begin with a woman's pregnancy and continue from birth through 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade." (Washington State Early Learning Plan, September, 2010.)

While the plan and summit were full of optimism, storm clouds were gathering around Seattle's PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> effort. The New School Foundation's Kohn had announced she was stepping down as executive director because her family was moving to California. Her decision dealt a blow to the tiny foundation, which has only three staff members: Kohn; a finance director; and an office manager. Kohn led the organization as it evolved into an advocate for PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> policies in Seattle and statewide. One of the loudest voices in Seattle calling for better alignment of PreKindergarten and early grade school was leaving just as that strategy was poised to spread. It was also a setback for the statewide movement, which lost

one of its leaders. Kohn brought a tenacity and passion to the effort, according to Tonja Rucker, who led a review of Seattle's PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> work for the National League of Cities.

Partly spurred by Kohn's departure, the New School Foundation merged with the League of Education Voters, a Seattle-based advocacy group focused on education reform, in June 2011. The move gave the Foundation stability and a bigger stage to push for change. But it also placed the foundation within an organization with a far broader agenda. Early learning is among the League's priorities, but it works on everything from education bond issues to college readiness. Where will PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> fit on its list?

"It really cements the importance and prioritization of our focus on early learning. There is no doubt that this work is going to be a very significant part of what we do going forward," said Chris Korsmo, Chief Executive Officer at the League of Education Voters.

Earlier in the year, the effort lost another supporter when Seattle superintendent Maria Goodloe-Johnson was let go amid allegations of mismanagement in the district's business development program.<sup>xx</sup>

In what may have been the biggest blow, the school district eliminated the position of Director of Early Learning as part of a budget-cutting effort. While the League will find another leader for the New School Foundation's work, and interim superintendent Susan Enfield is a strong supporter of integrating PreK and elementary school, that decision removed the individual charged with strategic planning and support for implementation of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> in the school district and one of the region's more passionate advocates, Mary Seaton.

Finally, the district's decision to cut the job potentially raises another issue. Creating the position in late 2009 signaled the district's support for the strategy, and its elimination could raise questions about its commitment among private funders who might support the work in the future. There has been no evidence, however, this has occurred. Interim superintendent Susan Enfield stressed that the district remains committed to the long-term development of a PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> continuum.

Together, these three departures blew a hole in the leadership of the PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> movement just as it was gaining momentum. Leadership is now more important than ever because the community is pushing for

change in one of the worst fiscal climates in the recent history of the Seattle Public Schools, city, and state. There simply is not much money for new initiatives.

That could change this fall. In November 2011, Seattle voters will consider the Families & Education Levy, which could be worth \$234 million. During the last 21 years, voters have passed three proposed Families & Education levies, but they have never cast their ballots in such a poor economic time. If it passes, there could be more money for PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> work because the levy's

advisory committee proposed doubling early learning spending from the last version, passed in 2004. The New School Foundation's first executive director, Holly Miller, will be in charge of the money as Seattle's Director of Education.

**The plan encourages breaking down the barriers of traditional silos based on children's narrow age ranges, old funding patterns, different types of development (i.e., physical, mental, social/emotional, etc.) and the historic distinctions between a child's first five years and the school years.**

New School's budget will also change. When its current donor's ten-year commitment ends next year, he will donate money on a year-to-year basis.

Even without an influx of new money, the New School Foundation's departing Executive Director expects Seattle to make progress.

"It's true that it will require additional funding to expand access to quality PreK and Full-Day Kindergarten, but we can make enormous strides immediately on quality improvements across the continuum, aligned testing and data-sharing, increased family engagement, and curriculum connections. Seattle [has] begun to make these changes and has committed to completing them in the next 18 months, and other Washington districts are making these changes as well," Kohn said.

The Seattle School District remains committed to implementing the Five-Year Action Plan, interim superintendent Enfield wrote in a two-page explanation of the district's PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> plans. Next year, the district will expand its professional development program, which currently brings together PreK, Kindergarten, and First Grade educators, to include Second and Third Grade teachers, Enfield wrote. It also will operate two demonstration sites where veterans of that program will open their classrooms to other staff to show how they implement instructional strategies. With money scarce, the district will expand its support of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> systems at schools and with teachers, as additional funding is available, according to the district.

"Although this financial support will be at a much lower level than South Shore enjoyed, it will be sufficient to assist each school in developing the outreach to their in-building and community-based childcare programs and ensure greater continuity from grade to grade," Enfield wrote. "We believe that all of this work is a testament to our long-term commitment to develop an effective early learning PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> continuum."

The question is: Will it take only five years to implement this plan? The lack of funding suggests it may take longer than originally hoped, but it will move forward.

"I think it's unstoppable," said Bob Watt, a former president of the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce, Boeing Co. executive, and long-time supporter of early education efforts. "We have reached critical mass."



## Tough Questions—Tough Choices

Whatever the budget, Seattle and state policymakers will be able to draw lessons from the New School Foundation when they implement PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> strategies, even if they cannot replicate all of New School's ideas. Perhaps the most important lesson is the need for a long-term commitment. During a period when public discussions of education reform often focus on finding magic bullets, whether it's linking teacher's pay to student performance or one-time federal grants to spur innovation, the New School showed that change takes a long time. In Seattle's case, it has taken 20 years and counting.

"The whole urban school (challenges) are a bigger, harder, more complex problem than many people want to believe," said the foundation's anonymous donor, who hopes to be still funding South Shore School ten years from now. "We did not get to this place overnight, and we won't fix it overnight either."

The last 20 years also showed the benefits of a small and flexible foundation, free to focus on its mission of developing a model school and advocating because it was not distracted by fundraising. Two donors provided nearly all of its funding. This flexibility also allowed New School to change and develop ways to leverage its work to build support around the state for the broader ideas of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup>.

New School's role in Washington's PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> movement over the last six years highlights the need for strong leadership on multiple levels. A large group of people were responsible for Washington's progress, but it can be argued that leaders on three levels, locally by Kohn at New School, agency-wide by DEL's Bette Hyde and statewide by Governor Gregoire, played defining roles.

The fact that no single entity led the effort shows the importance of the cooperation found at the 2011 early education summit. This strategy covers multiple jurisdictions of city, state, and federal agencies, and that demands partnerships. In Washington, foundations and nonprofits helped to bridge these different areas, during a period of falling tax revenue and tight budgets. The Gates Foundation provided an example of this private-public partnership when it expanded the capacity of school districts and the state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to support PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> work through its grants.

Finally, the New School Foundation showed that building models is crucial, whether or not every lesson and system that emerges from those efforts can be replicated. South Shore School is now a hub, where principals, superintendents, teachers, policymakers, and journalists gather to see how one version of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> works.

"To me it is absolutely critical," said Swati Adarkar, executive director of the Children's Institute. "We don't think enough about implementation."

Today, Washington has its models in South Seattle, Bremerton, Toppenish, and elsewhere. Now, Seattle and state leaders must decide what to do with those examples. Tight city and state budgets, leadership shifts, and organizational changes will shape their decisions over the next five years. Ultimately, they will confront a set of fundamental questions, including:

- Will Seattle Public Schools make a district-wide bet and implement PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> systems in every school, or at least every Title I school? Or, will its leaders phase in those ideas, a direction the system appears to be heading? Given the lack of public resources, how long will it take to see measurable change?

- Will Seattle Public Schools attract new support from private and nonprofit sources, such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to help integrate early learning and K-3 around the city?
- Will efforts to expand PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> strategies more broadly around the state and in Seattle overcome teaching styles and educational systems developed over decades?
- What measurable results, in such areas as high school graduation rates and college attendance, will programs at South Shore, Bremerton, and Toppenish schools produce when students from the first classes reach college and the workforce?

The work of the New School Foundation is one of the main reasons Seattle and Washington have the opportunity to debate these questions and make these choices.

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## Appendix A—The Foundation of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup>

The formal PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> strategy emerged during the last decade, but the idea of creating better connections between PreKindergarten and the first four grades of elementary school goes back at least to the 1960s.

Three programs are often cited as leading efforts to integrate PreK through Third Grade: Project Follow Through; the National Head Start/Public School Transition Demonstration Project; and the Chicago Child-Parent Center Program.

**Project Follow Through:** The program was launched in 1968 as an ambitious effort to build on the promise of Head Start.<sup>i</sup> “...What we tried to do was create a dovetailed program from Kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade that would continue to incorporate Head Start’s bedrock principles of parent involvement and comprehensive services. These would be joined to appropriate curricula during these four foundational grades of primary school,” Yale University professor Edward Zigler, who helped plan the effort, wrote in a 2009 essay for Education Week.<sup>ii</sup>

**National Head Start/Public School Transition Demonstration Project:** The federal government created the seven-year initiative in 1990 to continue key elements of Head Start in Kindergarten, First, Second and Third Grades, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The program focused on parental involvement, family support, educational enhancement and health and nutrition supports, the agency reported.<sup>iii</sup>

**Chicago Child-Parent Center Program:** The Chicago-based program is one of the nation’s longest running systems to integrate early learning and early elementary grades. Launched in 1967, it focuses on providing high quality PreK, as well as Kindergarten, First, Second and Third grade in some centers. While the initiative dealt with budget cuts in recent years, it currently operates 24 centers.<sup>iv</sup>

### Further Reading:

- “PK-3 Education: Programs and Practices that Work in Children’s First Decade” p. 4. Foundation for Child Development. (<http://fcdus.org/sites/default/files/ProgramsandPractices.pdf>)
- A Brief History of the National Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project, Executive Summary, Administration for Children & Families, Department of Health and Human Services. ([http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/ch\\_trans/reports/transition\\_study/trans\\_study\\_exesum.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/ch_trans/reports/transition_study/trans_study_exesum.html))
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## Appendix B—Funding: Per Student Costs

**Note:** In the three school years preceding fiscal year 2002, the T.T. Minor Elementary School received \$3.7 million in funding and “in-kind” donations from Stuart Sloan and other donors.

T.T. Minor Elementary				New School at South Shore			
Enrollment	Dollars	Dollars per Student	Percent	Enrollment	Dollars	Dollars per Student	Percent
<b>Fiscal 2002 Actuals</b>							
Number of Students	242						None
Funding per Student:							
WSF/SSD/Other	1,222,650	5,052	50.40%				
New School Foundation	1,203,478	4,973	49.60%		348,378		N/A
Total per Student	2,426,128	10,025	100.00%				
<b>Fiscal 2003 Actuals</b>							
Number of Students	242				102		
Funding per Student:							
WSF/SSD/Other	1,238,478	5,118	50.74%		194,660	1,908	14.04%
New School Foundation	1,202,189	4,968	49.26%		1,191,417	11,681	85.96%
Total per Student	2,440,667	10,085	100.00%		1,386,077	13,589	100.00%
<b>Fiscal 2004 Actuals</b>							
Number of Students	262				154		
Funding per Student:							
WSF/SSD/Other	1,371,897	5,236	52.33%		481,832	3,129	26.12%
New School Foundation	1,249,487	4,769	47.67%		1,363,186	8,852	73.88%
Total per Student	2,621,384	10,005	100.00%		1,845,018	11,981	100.00%
<b>Fiscal 2005 Actuals</b>							
Number of Students	246				203		
Funding per Student:							
WSF/SSD/Other	1,509,407	6,136	58.55%		714,292	3,519	31.79%
New School Foundation	1,068,443	4,343	41.45%		1,532,486	7,549	68.21%
Total per Student	2,577,850	10,479	100.00%		2,246,778	11,068	100.00%
<b>Fiscal 2006 Actuals</b>							
Number of Students	215				253		
Funding per Student:							
WSF/SSD/Other	1,253,935	5,832	69.35%		978,291	3,867	39.04%
New School Foundation	554,187	2,578	30.65%		1,527,571	6,038	60.96%
Total per Student	1,808,122	8,410	100.00%		2,505,862	9,905	100.00%
<b>Fiscal 2007 Actuals</b>							
Number of Students	237				303		
Funding per Student:							
WSF/SSD/Other	1,834,215	7,739	89.52%		1,248,550	4,121	47.37%
New School Foundation	214,734	906	10.48%		1,387,247	4,578	52.63%
Total per Student	2,048,949	8,645	100.00%		2,635,797	8,699	100.00%

T.T. Minor Elementary				New School at South Shore			
Enrollment	Dollars	Dollars per Student	Percent	Enrollment	Dollars	Dollars per Student	Percent
<b>Fiscal 2008 Budget/Actuals<sup>(1)</sup></b>							
Number of Students				358			
Funding per Student:							
WSF/SSD/Other	1,782,395	4,979	58.82%				
New School Foundation	1,247,909	3,486	41.18%				
Total per Student	3,030,304	8,465	100.00%				
<b>Fiscal 2009 Budget/Actuals<sup>(1)</sup></b>							
Number of Students				432			
Funding per Student:							
WSF/SSD/Other	2,189,697	5,069	58.46%				
New School Foundation	1,556,252	3,602	41.54%				
Total per Student	3,745,949	8,671	100.00%				
<b>Fiscal 2010 Budget/Actuals<sup>(1)(2)</sup></b>							
Number of Students				552			
Funding per Student:							
WSF/SSD/Other	2,850,829	5,165	69.01%				
New School Foundation	1,280,102	2,319	30.99%				
Total per Student	4,130,931	7,484	100.00%				
<b>Fiscal 2011 Budget<sup>(2)</sup></b>							
Number of Students				644			
Funding per Student:							
WSF/SSD/Other	3,529,608	5,481	77.92%				
New School Foundation	1,000,000	1,553	22.08%				
Total per Student	4,529,608	7,034	100.00%				
<b>Fiscal 2012 Budget<sup>(2)</sup></b>							
Number of Students				648			
Funding per Student:							
WSF/SSD/Other	3,728,650	5,754	78.85%				
New School Foundation	1,000,000	1,543	21.15%				
Total per Student	4,728,650	7,297	100.00%				

1) Represents a combination of projected figures from the SSD and actual expenditures that the Foundation pays for directly.

2) Excludes Level 4 SPED student numbers (both head count and additional funding).



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